Public employee unions have been a center of state and national political conflict and media attention in recent years. Despite some labor successes in California, Georgia, North Carolina, Oklahoma, and Texas (Greenhouse, 2013), new state laws—notably in Wisconsin, Indiana, Michigan, New Hampshire, and New Jersey—have rolled back the power of organized labor by enacting collective bargaining restrictions, right-to-work statutes, pay freezes, and/or benefit cuts. The most dramatic of related events was the spontaneous working-class uprising in Wisconsin during the winter of 2010–2011, the size and intensity of which had not been seen in generations.

A self-induced Wisconsin state budget shortfall, resulting from corporate tax breaks, was used to curtail public employee rights and scale back pay and benefits (“Governor Walker’s Pretext,” 2011). The surprise introduction of a bill that would decimate collective bargaining led to more than 10,000 people demonstrating at the state capitol in three weeks of around-the-clock protests. Some legislators fled to Illinois in an effort to forestall passage of the bill, but a late-
night party-line vote, with little debate on the 140-page bill, ensured that it became law. When the state supreme court narrowly upheld the statute, recall elections of four key legislators, and later the governor, took place; the governor won, while two lawmakers did not (Buhle & Buhle, 2011; Nichols, 2012).

At the national level, organized labor has been unable to secure passage of the long-sought Employee Free Choice Act (to strengthen the ability of workers to organize and to seek injunctions against unfair labor practices). Pro-union forces also lost a hotly contested union election at a Tennessee Volkswagen assembly plant in 2014. Additionally, in *Harris v. Quinn* (2014), the Supreme Court, in permitting part-time employees to opt out of union membership, made it more difficult to organize workers.

The labor movement has been able, however, to block, and even repeal, legislation detrimental to employees (e.g., reforms at the Department of Defense and Department of Homeland Security; see Brook & King, 2011; Tobias, 2010). In addition, some 50,000 Transportation Security Agency airport personnel were unionized in 2011. A year later, the Chicago public school strike led to a 17% salary increase for teachers. Finally, 2014 witnessed several important events: the National Labor Relations Board issued a landmark complaint against Walmart, accusing the corporation of violating labor law in its treatment of striking workers (Kolker & Drawbaugh, 2014); the National Labor Relations Board also ruled, in the spring, that college football players have a right to form a union and to collectively bargain (Rhoden, 2014); and University of Connecticut graduate student assistants successfully unionized (Greenblatt, 2014).

These developments are best understood in the larger context of the long-standing deterioration of the labor movement in the country. It has stemmed from use of part-time temporary workers in full-time positions, outsourcing of jobs to private contractors, relocation of plants to right-to-work states, shipping of jobs overseas, and depressed wages and benefits for union members and nonmembers alike. If the Great Depression of the 1930s invigorated unions, the Great Recession of contemporary times eviscerated them. In Wisconsin, for example, the new law could have simply abolished collective bargaining completely. Instead, the state legislature enacted numerous incentives for employees to quit their unions. This had the effect of making it seem that the destruction of the unions was their own fault (Greenhouse, 2014).

By 2013, the percentage of workers in unions fell to 11.3%, the lowest level since 1916 (Greenhouse, 2013). Public servants (notably teachers, police officers, firefighters, nurses, and postal personnel) now account for more than half of unionized employees, as nearly four in 10 government personnel are union members compared with fewer than one in 10 corporate workers. This reflects the dissolution of the post–World War II social contract at work as both private and public sector employees confront restrictive systems of labor control. As Meyerson (2013b) writes, “traditional collective bargaining has all but vanished from the economic landscape—taking raises, benefits, job security, and much of the American middle class with it” (para. 2).

Deep-seated corporate antiunion animus, regulatory systems indifferent to worker rights, the disappearance of the labor beat from the mass media, union excesses, and a union role conversion (from collective action to benefit all workers to providing services for existing members) have undermined the support and legitimacy of the labor movement (Burns, 2011; Richards, 2008). Indeed by 2013, just 51% of Americans had a favorable view of unions as contrasted with 72% in 1936 (Boris, 2012; Meyerson, 2013a). “Organized labor,” write Richard C. Kearney and Patrice Mareschal, “has not told a compelling story of why today’s workers should want to join a union, nor has it manufactured the positive public image and support necessary to nurture a receptive audience” (2014, p. 13)—although the trendsetting millennial generation holds much more favorable attitudes about unions compared to older Americans (Greenblatt, 2014, p. 20).
Notwithstanding their precarious state today, unions remain a political force and play a role in promoting economic development, health care, and education, and in mobilizing voters in political campaigns. There are few other nationwide organizations that support the broad range of middle-class economic interests. Yet Riccucci asks, “is there a ‘there’ there?” finding that public administration research on labor relations “is sporadic and uneven, perhaps negligible” (2011, p. 203; see also Francia, 2006). Riccucci notes that work on government labor-management relations is done by scholars in law, economics, and business, but seldom by public administration scholars. Chester A. Newland—in a question-and-answer session following Elaine Kamark’s keynote speech on the failure of management in the federal government at the 2014 Annual Meeting of the American Society of Public Administration—stated that the profession had no one to blame but itself for this state of affairs, as it had abandoned administration and implementation problems in the last generation to focus on public policy issues.

Given the considerable interest in the topic of labor-management relations—at least outside of the public administration academy—this study examines the attention that comprehensive introductory works devote to it. Such works define the proper domain and focus of a discipline, its paradigm, and its essential elements. These publications are unique because they expose readers to “proper thinking” about the subject, and as such, they must strive to be “impeccable” (Nobel laureate Paul Krugman, quoted in Henry, 2013, p. vii). Introductory texts also likely affect how workplace relations are presented and understood in the classroom. Their significance is enhanced by the fact that many graduate public policy and public administration programs do not require human resource management or employee relations coursework in their curriculum. As a rough indicator, just three of the top 20 Master of Public Administration (MPA) programs require a core human resource management course; none require labor-management relations. Thus, the initial master’s degree class may be one of the few opportunities for students to examine the topic.

Labor-management relations is a seminal field in the study of public administration because it performs a sanctioning role (Klingner, Nalbandian, & Llorens, 2009) by defining the terms of the employer-employee interaction. The field authorizes, through collective bargaining, the working conditions and activities of the administrative state, the effects of which are visible throughout society. Its domain includes the employer and employee capacity to run the machinery of government, thereby helping to complete agency missions and achieve the goals of democratic governance. As such, the foundations of the discipline of public administration, as well as its functions, have been and will be, directly or indirectly, affected by labor-management relations. All textbooks, accordingly, discuss the subject, and it is reasonable to ask what is, and might be, included. Such self-portraits have important implications for public administration and the citizens it serves. The same, of course, can be said for business administration and its customers.

The data reported here should be of concern to the entire profession: those involved in standard setting and accreditation (who could encourage consideration of the subject), practicing managers (who sometimes wonder about the efficacy of academic treatises), book authors and publishers (who might review topical coverage in their publications), and students and instructors (who may wish to check the adequacy of the text they use). The current investigation continues with an overview of contemporary union activity. The conceptual framework used in the research is then presented, followed by the findings from the study. This article concludes with a discussion of the implications of the data.

BACKGROUND: OVERVIEW AND DIMENSIONS OF EMPLOYEE RELATIONS
Given the central place of labor relations in public management, it is useful to briefly canvass labor relations’ role in current public administration theory and practice. Three specific topics are discussed below: contemporary
history, pertinent laws, and collective bargaining processes. Many of the comments here pertain to the field of business administration as well.

The final quarter of the 20th century was a time of economic flux and uncertainty: energy crises, stagflation, and the beginnings of the demise of the labor movement during the 1970s; global competition and deindustrialization in the 1980s; and the “new economy” of the 1990s. What emerged, through programs of deregulation and privatization, were doctrines and policies advocating reliance on the market to allocate society’s resources. This approach saw its fullest expression in the initial decade of the new millennium, when markets were regarded as good, efficient, nonpartisan, and objective. Public provision of goods and services was seen as an obstacle to economic development as neoliberalism became the dominant ideology through which economic activity was to be understood. Government policies to buffer citizens from the business cycle were altered in the name of market-based strategies. New Public Management prescriptions aimed at the welfare state sought to reduce government’s capacity to act; weaken merit system protections, job security, and worker rights; and privatize much of the civil service.

The rise and decline of unions in contemporary history is well documented: representing over one third of the workplace by midcentury, they were a countervailing power against business and government in American democracy (Early, 2013; Galbraith, 2010; Reich, 2007). Viewed as the champion of the underdog, organized labor was influential in many policy debates (e.g., trade, taxes, fair labor standards, social security, civil rights, public education, health care, equal pay for women, workplace safety). Its gains went well beyond on-the-job concerns, transforming the lives of all Americans and helping build the middle class.

The achievements made by private sector unions did not go unnoticed by civil servants. A surge in public service unionism resulted from President John F. Kennedy’s 1962 executive order authorizing federal worker unionization and limited collective bargaining rights, as well as from laws passed in 41 states granting collective bargaining or meet-and-confer rights to all or part of their workforce. Overall, compensation and productivity doubled in American society during the first 30 years after World War II.

During the next 30 years, labor’s clout diminished as the effects of the Taft-Hartley Act of 1947 (outlawing actions by unions not involved in a dispute and undermining unions in “right-to-work” states) and the Landrum-Griffin Act of 1959 (allowing hiring of non-union workers and permitting them to vote in union certification elections) became manifest. Historian Colin Gordon (2013) writes:

And labor continued to reel through the concessionary bargaining of the 1970s and 1980s—an era highlighted by the filibuster of labor law reform in 1978, the Reagan administration’s crushing of the PATCO [Professional Air Traffic Controllers Organization] strike, the Chrysler bailout (which set the template for “too big to fail” corporate rescues built around deep concessions by workers), and the passage of anti-worker trade deals with Mexico and China [in the 1990s]. (p. 34)

Perhaps the single most telling event was the 1981 PATCO strike:

Abraham Lincoln valued organized labor; Grover Cleveland sent the army to suppress it; Harry Truman challenged the right to strike in coal, rail, and steel; Lyndon Johnson acted on issues of workplace health. But it was left to Ronald Reagan, the nation’s fortieth president, to do what none had done before: destroy a labor union. Reagan’s decimation in 1981 of PATCO would prove a seminal failure of labor-management relations in America, one from which the labor movement has never fully recovered…. the showdown with the nation’s air traffic controllers would reveal the extent to which the ground had weakened under labor’s feet. (Dray, 2011, p. 616)
The results of this erosion of worker rights have been palpable and deleterious: the shift of economic risk from employers to employees has caused hardship and anxiety in the workforce, the fear of fringe benefit and/or job loss leaving large segments of society feeling financially insecure (Hacker, 2006; West & Bowman, 2008). The union movement, in fact, has been on the defensive to protect fair labor standards established during the New Deal, given that pay and benefits have largely reached a plateau during the last 30 years.

Victim of its earlier success in improving compensation and working conditions, organized labor came to be viewed as just another special interest unsuited to a changing economy and unjustly protective of marginal employees. The National Labor Relations Board did little to curb businesses’ union-busting strategies. Relevant laws made it very difficult for workers to organize, union-avoidance consultants enabled firms to operate union-free, and when offenses occurred, companies were seldom penalized (Bronfenbrenner, 2009; Getman, 2012; Greenhouse, 2009; Logan, 2006).

In the public arena, after the dramatic rise in the 1960s and 1970s, union membership flattened in the 1980s, and has remained stagnant since that time, due to chronic fiscal stress, limited government growth, privatization, and taxpayer hostility. While these trends occurred earlier in the business sector, in both private and public administration, the market—absent a strong labor movement—does not assure that employees will share in the benefits of increased productivity and economic growth. Indeed, the combination of suppression of employee organizations, weak enforcement of labor laws, and violations of worker rights in the United States is unique among advanced nations (Delaney, 2005; Kearney & Mareschal, 2014, p. 32).

In short, important facets of labor-management relations include its evolution, legal basis, and collective bargaining procedures. These foundational elements help inform the analysis below.

THE STUDY
Included here are elementary public administration textbooks currently in print (n = 11, see Table 1); not considered are supplemental works (e.g., Fry & Raadschelders, 2008), readers, and casebooks (e.g., Stillman, 2010), as well as instructor manuals and teaching materials that sometimes accompany beginning texts. These primary works, as noted, are an appropriate barometer because they certify the significance of labor relations in the profession. In addition to the public administration textbooks, six of the many beginning business administration textbooks (see Table 2) were considered to provide an adequate basis for brief comparisons.

The next section reports raw data on the context of management-union relations material in the publications: the amount and placement of the topic, the use of graphics, and sources cited. The three-part interpretive framework below was used to evaluate the content of relevant coverage in the texts. The following categories focus on employer-employee relations in the field—why it is essential, what it is, and how it is presented.

1. The stated (or implied) importance of the topic (the nature of the justification for inclusion in the text).
2. The definition of labor-management relations (the presence of an explanation of the term).
3. The style of the discussion (the descriptive or normative quality of the narrative).

While the taxonomy facilitates the task at hand, it is certainly not definitive; the classifications are, however, reasonable and useful for exploratory purposes. The present authors independently evaluated the texts; ambiguous cases were discussed and resolved. Since the purpose is to provide an overview of the general treatment of the subject, individual texts are not evaluated separately (for a review of public administration texts, see Beckett-Camarata & Dudley, 2010; also refer to Rouse, 2013); examples from the database, however, are used to illustrate the inquiry.
### Table 1
Summary of Labor-Management Relations in Public Administration Texts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Textbook title, edition, author names and year published</th>
<th>Chapter or section title</th>
<th>Page range(s) relevant pages</th>
<th>Total N pages in book</th>
<th>% Relevant pages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

**TOTALS** 5,395 2.28

*Notes.* All texts are listed with full publication data in the References section. NLRB = National Relations Board.
### TABLE 2
Summary of Labor-Management Relations Content in Business Administration Texts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Textbook title, edition, author names and year published</th>
<th>Chapter or section title</th>
<th>Page range(s) relevant pages</th>
<th>Total N pages in book</th>
<th>% Relevant pages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTALS</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>3,323</strong></td>
<td><strong>2.80</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes. All texts are listed with full publication data in the References section. HR = human resources.
FINDINGS

Context
By definition, the introductory texts typically present parameters of the profession by devoting chapters to the broad scope of the field. (The average length of public administration books is over 490 pages vs. 553 pages in business administration books; see Tables 1 and 2.) In public administration this includes such topics as the political environment, history of the field, democracy and bureaucracy, organization theory and behavior, intergovernmental relations, human resource management, planning-implementation-evaluation, budgeting and finance, policy decision making, productivity and performance management, leadership, accountability, and cognate subjects. These issues are covered in a span of 10 chapters (one text) to 14 chapters (four books).

Public sector labor-management relations appear as a part of a human resource management chapter in eight of the 11 reviewed public administration volumes:

- Johnson (2009), three pages.
- King and Chilton (2009), three pages.
- Henry (2013), four pages.
- Holzer and Schwester (2012), four pages
- Rosenbloom, Kravchuk, and Clerkin (2009), six pages.
- Denhardt, Denhardt, and Blanc (2014), nine pages.
- Shafritz, Russell, and Borick (2013), 14 pages.

Kettl (2015) contains two human resource chapters that address the topic in a total of 11 pages. One work, Berkley and Rouse (2008), devotes a separate, 41-page chapter to employment relations (see Table 1). The total coverage constitutes 2.28% of the total page count of the 11 publications (123 of 5,395 pages).5

The texts, when considered together, include subject matter such as historical development of unions, differences in public-private unionization, federal-state-local issues, collective bargaining, impasse procedures, and strikes, as well as specific topics such as air traffic controllers, teacher unions, and union-busting. Landmark laws and executive actions (e.g., the Lloyd-LaFollette Act of 1912, the National Labor Relations Act of 1935, President John F. Kennedy's 1962 Executive Order 10988, and the Civil Service Reform Act of 1978) also can be found in some of these narratives. In addition, commonly found index listings in selected volumes include at-will employment, American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees (AFSCME), Professional Air Traffic Controllers Organization (PATCO), union density, pay premiums, and work stoppage alternatives.6

Most labor-management discussions are illustrated by various kinds of graphics (e.g., tables, charts, figures, exhibits, cases, cartoons, photos), although five books have none. While Berkley and Rouse's (2008) chapter has 10 tables, three exhibits, and two figures, the relevant material in most books has one graphic (although Milakovich and Gordon [2013] supply four and Kettl [2015] offers three). The coverage was substantiated by considering the number of citations (ranging from 3 to 67); six books have a suggested human resource management reading list, but only one includes labor-management sources in it. The references comprise a variety of sources (e.g., human resources and labor relations texts, Bureau of Labor Statistics, anthologies, journal articles, and newspaper stories authored by scholars, government officials, and journalists).

Business administration texts likewise discuss the history of labor unions, current trends in their membership, collective bargaining, negotiating tactics available to management and labor, and the laws regulating labor-management interactions. Only one of the six textbooks examined devotes a separate chapter to the topic of labor-management relations (Pride, Hughes, & Kapoor, 2012), though another both dedicated a final section of its human resource chapter to labor-management relations and gave it pride of place in the chapter title (“Human Resource Management: From Recruitment to Labor Relations,” Chapter 8 in Boone & Kurtz, 2012).
Three of the other four books—Ferrell, Hirt, and Ferrell (2013); Nickels, McHugh, and McHugh (2012); and Ebert and Griffin (2012)—offer their remarks on these issues throughout the text, while the fourth discusses strategies that would be useful in collective bargaining, but without mentioning either labor or management by name (Kaufman, 2012). Also like their public administration counterparts, most of the business administration textbooks (in fact, all but one) make use of graphs, charts, tables, and photos in their coverage of topics and supplement conceptual discussions with concrete examples and cases. Nichols and colleagues (2012) include seven pictures, five figures, and one cartoon; Pride and colleagues (2012) provide seven pictures, three graphs, two figures, and three cases; Ferrell and colleagues (2013) feature two figures, one picture, and one case; Boone and Kurtz (2012) display one figure and one picture; Ebert and Griffin (2012) provide only one figure. The number of citations ranged from zero (Kaufman, 2012) to 53 (Nichols et al., 2012). Three of the books (Boone & Kurtz, 2012; Ebert & Griffin, 2012; and Nichols et al., 2012) include separate columns in the text with formal definitions of terms. Nichols and colleagues (2012) also include review/discussion questions and skill-building exercises.

While labor-management relations represented 2.28% of total coverage in public administration textbooks, the coverage in business administration was 2.80% of the total pages in the six textbooks (93 of 3,323 pages; see Table 2).

**Content**

With the descriptive background data in hand, the focus now shifts to the content of the literature: how the books perceive labor-management relations. Using the framework outlined earlier—the rationale for considering the topic, its definition, and the style of presentation—the findings are shown below.

**Importance and Definition.** Eight of the public administration publications contain a stated justification for examining the subject, ranging from (a) its pervasive nature to (b) the value of amicable employee relations, (c) cost concerns, (d) the importance of limits on collective bargaining, (e) equity problems, (f) the need for employee protections, (g) the corrective for asymmetric power relations, and (h) the desirability of avoiding strikes. Thus, Denhardt and colleagues (2014, p. 224) observe that labor-management relations (notably the rise and decline of unions) “cuts across the field of human resource management.” King and Chilton (2009, p. 180) indicate that “protection of public personnel rights and responsibilities is the focus” of collective bargaining, a function that can affect “the public through indirect and direct economic, social, and political means” and can reorder “the power relations between management and labor.” Similarly, Hill and Lynn (2009, pp. 155–156) highlight the significance of the “protection principle,” stressing “the continued necessity of rules constraining managerial discretion” and how provisions in collectively negotiated labor contracts can protect employees from “reprisals or arbitrary decisions by public officials.” Holzer and Schwester (2012, p. 127), in turn, emphasize that “public administration scholars…agree that harmonious labor-management relationships are central to improving employee performance.”

Johnson (2009, p. 246) suggests, with some caveats, that unionized workforces increase government costs, arguing that “nearly all observers believe that collective bargaining has increased the expenditures of government.” Rosenbloom and colleagues (2009, p. 244) write that “the main point of limited scope of bargaining is to ensure that matters of public policy are determined by representative government institutions rather than through a special process that shares political authority with private organizations.”

Kettl (2015, pp. 206–207), meanwhile, focuses on equity concerns and public/private unionization differentials, maintaining that “the norm of equity calls for similar treatment for people in similar situations [including compensation] …and for the right …to organize and bargain collectively.” And last, Shafritz and colleagues (2013, p. 414) point out that the significance of the subject “is painfully evident to anyone who has ever sniffed through a garbage strike, walked through a transit strike, or suffered thro-
ugh the blue flu [sic].” The other three works simply continue their discussions of personnel management functions and civil service systems by adding employment relations topics.

How, then, do the texts interpret the term labor-management relations? Most do not attempt a formal, “textbook-like” definition; in fact, eight volumes provide no specific explanation, perhaps seeing it as self-evident, but proceed with historical development, dynamics of collective bargaining, and current controversies. The remaining three publications, however, proffer the definitions quoted below:

- Labor-management relations: formal setting in which negotiations over pay, working conditions, and benefits take place. [This definition is supplemented by these complementary explanations: (a) “labor-management relations represent a form of organizational participation permitting individuals and groups other than formal leaders to have a voice in directing the organization,” and (b) “an essential element of labor-management relations is the phenomenon of structured relationships between formally organized participants in a shared management process.”] (Milakovich & Gordon, 2013, p. 300)

- Labor relations: the term for all of the interactions between union leaders (representing the employees) and management (representing the corporation/jurisdiction). (Shafritz et al., 2013, p. 414)

- Labor-management relations: the centerpiece of such formal relations [collective bargaining] to work out economic and work-related differences between labor and management. (King & Chilton, 2009, p. 180)

In short, while there are negative, neutral, and affirmative reasons offered for including labor-management relations in these volumes, it is often seen as unnecessary to directly define the term.

Examination of the business administration books reveals similar portrayals of the importance of the subject, though a few of the texts put a distinctively business-oriented interpretation on these shared themes. This overlap begins with the fact that the business books approach the topic in the context of human resource management. Thus, for example, Ferrell and colleagues (2013) echo Denhardt and colleagues (2014) when they justify their discussion of collective bargaining by observing that, due to the past success of union organizing in major industries, “significant aspects of HRM [human resources management], particularly compensation, are dictated to a large degree by union contracts at many companies” (Ferrell et al., 2013, p. 317). This is complemented by Boone and Kurtz (2012, p. 250), who argue that organized labor’s lasting effects on the nature of the workplace and the business environment require the close attention of human resources professionals, and the emphasis in Pride and colleagues (2012, p. 308) on the need for cooperation between labor and management in order to realize mutual benefits.

The other two books that directly address labor-management relations depart from this relatively neutral assessment. Although Nickels and colleagues (2012) stress how these issues require “goodwill,” the authors nevertheless seem to consider such issues to be just another set of “managerial challenges” in which the “hard decisions” businesses must make to maximize profit “[limit] managers’ chances to win popularity contests with workers” (p. 324). Meanwhile, Ebert and Griffin (2012) more explicitly view the issue through the additional lens of productivity. They close their discussion of the subject by noting that “differences in employee talent and productivity” are not as “easily copied” by competing firms (vs. equipment and technology), and that therefore “most well-managed companies today recognize the value provided by their employees and strive to ensure that the human resource function is managed as efficiently and effectively as possible” (Ebert & Griffin, 2012, p. 261).

Lastly, with respect to definitions, while all six of the business books define key terms such as
union (and distinguish between different types of unions), collective bargaining, labor contract, and others, only two offer explicit definitions of labor-management relations, and both do so in uncontroversial terms (see Ebert & Griffin, 2012, p. 257; Pride et al., 2012, p. 308). With these basics in hand, is the subject matter itself offered in a generally descriptive-objective or normative-subjective style, or in a blend of both by the public and private sector books?

Presentation Style. As befits a professional field, it might be anticipated that the publications would include normative views to complement the factual narratives customary in beginning textbooks. Berkley and Rouse (2008), for example, observe that

trade unionism, according to its detractors, erodes the concepts of government work as a public service. Unions perpetuate some of the worst features of personnel systems.…. [In contrast,] history shows that labor union membership contributed significantly to the relative affluence and attendant independence of middle-class Americans. (p. 194)

They argue that “unions are still needed to protect the worker. Evidence shows that as unions decline, the gap between executive and worker pay is growing” (Berkley & Rouse, 2008, p. 193).

Yet descriptive material predominates in nearly all of the public administration publications reviewed here. Indeed, the typical approach is to provide an expository account, in various degrees of detail, of the topics noted earlier (e.g., the evolution of unions, their legal foundation, differences between the United States and other nations, contrasts between government and business arenas, the scope of union activity, collective bargaining, effects of organized labor). Holzer and Schwester (2012, p. 127 and following pages), however, do not include these subjects; instead they advocate fostering labor-management cooperation, partnerships, and productivity as part of “creating a quality work environment.”

By and large, the business management textbooks mirror the neutral, descriptive style of the public administration texts. With the exception of the occasional business-oriented language described in the previous section, their coverage proceeds by dispassionately describing the needs and interests of both labor and management, their sometimes fraught history, their relative standings in the current economic environment, and the theoretical underpinnings of their relationship. Apart from that, the only other significant difference is that when first introducing labor, almost all of the business texts do so by describing it as a “factor of production” and, typically, following up with a discussion of labor productivity (see Ebert & Griffin, 2012, p. 7; Ferrell et al., 2013, pp. 8, 245; Nickels et al., 2012, pp. 9–10, 15). This is, of course, to be expected from publications oriented toward the successful management of a business; however, it does not seem to unduly color their portrayal of organized labor. This finding nevertheless reinforces the fact that such texts necessarily approach the issue with a preconceived set of concerns, in which labor is sometimes a means rather than an end in itself.

To summarize briefly, few books contained a stated or implied logic for including the topic of labor-management relations; many did not provide a rigorous definition of it; and in all but one (Berkley & Rouse, 2008), the discussion was characterized largely by a descriptive style.

A Finale? In the end, did the authors offer readers a conclusion, a normative statement (vs. factual summary), and/or speculative comments about the impact and/or future of employer-employee relations in public service? Six public administration books ventured an envoi on the centrality of labor-management relations in government; such concluding remarks focused on issues such as the effects of labor law, the reputation of unions, or the antagonistic character of employer-worker interactions. Thus, Berkley and Rouse (2008, pp. 191–192) raise the question, “Decline, Transformation, or Reformation?” early in the chapter of that name.
concluding that labor law has had important outcomes and including the following points:

- Economic benefits and economic costs do not necessarily explain when states enacted unionization laws,
- Unionization raises compensation in non-union jobs as well as union jobs, and wages are noticeably higher in right-to-strike states (but not higher in those states that have compulsory arbitration statutes), and
- Arbitrators tend to “split the difference” between management and union proposals.

They also suggest that prospects for the labor movement rest on changes in the legal environment, public attitudes, and economic conditions, and imply that demographic trends, if not the political climate, could benefit organized labor (Berkley & Rouse, 2008, pp. 192–193).

Second, Rosenbloom and colleagues (2009, p. 247) posit three possible futures for human resource management: greater flexibility, privatization, or abandonment of civil service. While all have ramifications for labor-management relations, the authors comment on only the flexibility scenario, opining that

if labor relations partnerships can substitute for traditional collective bargaining approaches, [then] rigid work rules, grievances, and complaints of unfair labor practices should be reduced and less adversarial methods of problem solving should be adopted. Traditional personnel systems designed for unskilled industrial workers are not the best fit for today’s well-educated, information-age public employees. (Rosenbloom et al., 2009, p. 247)

Next, Johnson (2009) writes that

public employee unions have long operated in an adversarial role toward government, as in the private sector, which has given unions a less-than-favorable popular image. They also have the reputation, sometimes deserved, of protecting members’ jobs by blocking needed reforms for greater efficiency. (p. 246)

Referring to changes at the Defense and Homeland Security departments, Milakovich and Gordon (2013, p. 312) find that “the future of public-sector unions and collective bargaining is likely to be a confrontational one.” Fifth, Shafritz and colleagues (2012), citing business professor Raymond Horton, predict that organized labor would continue to be a formidable political force until

politicians developed the political will to challenge them…This finally happened in a big way and in many parts of the nation at the same time in 2011…for two reasons: the sheer expense of union dominance and the fact that the public sector unions had overwhelmingly aligned themselves with the Democratic Party. (pp. 424–425)

With particular reference to the public service “pay poor/benefit rich” compensation package, Shafritz and colleagues (2012, p. 425) argue that pensions will be “severely constrained”; traditional, union-negotiated defined benefit pensions will be replaced by defined contribution 401(k) plans; and employees will have to manage their own pension assets.

Finally, Kettl (2015), in the context of the Wisconsin controversy (discussed above), believes that the

struggle over the future of public employee unions helped stoke other blazes around the nation. Public employee union leaders said they were determined not to give in. Those seeking to weaken their power were just as determined to use the budget battles to redefine the unions’ role—in both public administration and the nation’s politics. (p. 257)

In short, when taken as whole, the public administration textbook authors discuss the past and current impacts of organized labor and the hostile nature of employment relations. They forecast a heightened confrontational political environment as the role of unions, and the benefits they provide to their members, are being reassessed by lawmakers.
The business administration textbooks do not conclude their discussions of labor-management relations by reflecting on recent political battles. Instead, they overwhelmingly focus on the challenges facing unions in light of structural changes in the economy, suggesting ways in which “labor unions [can] change to maintain their relevance” (Boone & Kurtz, 2012, p. 253). Surprisingly, they tend to be relatively optimistic about labor’s prospects. Pride and colleagues (2012), for instance, claim that “antagonism now seems to be giving way to cooperation in union-management relations” (p. 308), and although they express doubt as to “whether unions will be able to regain the prominence and power they enjoyed” in their heyday, they do not doubt that unions “will remain a powerful force in particular industries” (p. 313).

Moreover, the business textbook discussions are fairly detailed on these challenges and opportunities for labor; none, however, provide a comprehensive examination of the totality of these factors, opting instead to mention a select few. The challenges described range from the more obvious, such as the shift toward a “service and knowledge-work economy” (Nickels et al., 2012, p. 337) and an increasingly “global economy and diverse workforce” (Boone & Kurtz, 2012, p. 253), to less frequently noted trends, such as a “geographic shift in the U.S. economy” in which “businesses have moved their operations to the south and southwest, areas that do not have a strong union heritage” (Ebert & Griffin, 2012, p. 258). In general, then, the business administration books provide an evenhanded analysis of the “crossroads” at which organized labor presently finds itself, and chart productive paths forward without necessarily privileging business interests.

**CONCLUSION: MISSING IN ACTION?**

By portraying the nature of the public administration field, the writers of the volumes under review are owed a debt of gratitude by the profession. In addition to addressing a diverse set of topics, they examine the context and content of labor-management relations in government. All offer some coverage of it, and most discuss a broad group of laws and values, illustrate their work with several graphics, and provide references. There is generally an implied or stated rationale for including the topic, but not necessarily an explicit definition of it. The narratives, as might be expected, are primarily descriptive in nature. A slim majority posit a conclusion about the impact and/or future of the labor movement. The baseline data reported here sheds light on the presentation of labor relations in the profession. What can be said of these findings?

First, regarding the context within which consideration of employer-employee interaction occurs, the sheer quantity of discussion can be described, at best, as modest. The authors of the present study cannot quantify what volume of relevant materials should be found in introductory texts—after all, quality is more important, and no one expects their writers to discuss everything. What might be anticipated, however, is that lengthy textbooks could pinpoint the axial role of labor-management relations in the administrative state and canvass key topics and developments.

As it stands, the existing amount is not overwhelming: four books supply four pages or less each, and just one book offers chapter-length treatment, with the balance of the authors supplying eight to 14 pages of narrative. Such limited coverage of employer-employee relations may reflect Riccucci’s (2011) concern, noted earlier, that the field is characterized by a dearth of scholarship. Benchmarking against business administration coverage reinforces this conclusion of scant attention given to labor-management relations in texts and helps to identify parallels in the topical coverage in business and public administration books.

Second, the location of the material in the books perhaps signals its significance in the profession: Is it positioned either a capstone to the entire work or as keystone close to the beginning? An inspection of the texts reveals that neither appears to be the case. Discussions of the topic most commonly appear in the broad middle parts of the texts (e.g., Chapter 6 in an 11-chapter book); the earliest it appears is in Chapter 3 of one 14-chapter text, and the latest, in Chapter 11 of a 14-chapter volume.
Judging from the tables of contents and indexes in the books, employment relations sections that are near the center of a book seem like just one more topic to be included at the expense of a strategic rationale for placement. Sections near the end of a book often look more like an add-on than a culmination, as they seldom flow from the foregoing discussions; in a similar manner, the discussions that appear near the beginning do not usually affect topics found elsewhere. If the subject is pivotal in the study of the field, then it does not receive the recognition appropriate to a cardinal subject matter in public administration.

Again, using the private sector texts as a reference point for comparison, they, too, briefly define key concepts and adopt a neutral or, in some cases, slightly business-oriented slant to their assessment, stressing the management challenges and productivity implications of good employer-employee relations. Like the public administration texts, they devote limited space and prominence to the subject relative to other topics. With less than two exhibits in the public service books, the variety of topics, provocative commentaries, and controversial case studies seem underrepresented. In terms of context, then, while there may be marginally satisfactory volume of coverage in some texts, there is something of a lacuna with respect to the impact of the material (wherever it is placed) on the rest of the book.

Concerning substantive content, most of the public administration works (eight) include a criterion of inclusion for the topic. As noted, these include the nature of employee relations, cost issues, equity concerns, limits on bargaining, employee protection, counterbalance to power relations, and strikes. The second content factor, definition of the term, was met by three books; the rest did not offer a definition, perhaps regarding it as self-defining.

Third, the overriding style of presentation was factual exposition. Little difference was found in the way business texts presented material: they also generally lacked compelling cases, commentaries, and issue analyses. The business management books varied on providing a justification for topic inclusion, typically inter-spersed occasional references to labor-management relations in less prominent places throughout the book, and usually lacked systematic or formal definition of labor-management relations.

Those public administration books that do not attempt a conclusion about the significance of workplace relations in government would do well to do so—if for no other reason than to fortify and enhance the previous material, as well as to inspire students. The importance of such an initiative should be evident: Rights to just working conditions are derived from constitutional freedoms of speech and assembly, the National Labor Relations Act of 1935, and the 1948 United Nations’ Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Without these rights, employee organizations cannot be created or sustained. In stark contrast to other Western industrialized democracies, the failure to uphold worker rights is a singularly American phenomenon (Gross, 2010). As Robert Creamer (2014) writes, “Every worker should have the right to be in a union in exactly the same way that every American has the right to vote.” Such rights, while they may differ in specifics from public to private sector, deserve greater attention than they currently receive in business administration texts as well. In short, it is premature to conclude the death of the labor movement, because the battle for workers’ rights will always exist (Mihelich, 2014).

There are, then, several implications of the findings for stakeholders in the public administration field ...(many of which apply to business management). Instructors, first, may wish to change reading assignments, expand lecture material, and/or suggest to authors and publishing representatives that additional consideration be given to the topic. Scholars and their publishers, accordingly, can help readers understand that labor-management relations is critical to administering the public’s business. Managers and union officials, too, can contribute by volunteering as guest speakers, becoming adjunct professors, providing internship oppor-
opportunities, and attending professional conferences to bring real-world employment relations to academe. Accrediting bodies can serve in all of these endeavors by promoting engagement in labor-management relations and enforcing—as well as strengthening—their standards.

While there may be no clear analogue for the role of labor-management relations in the private sector, labor relations is a key to the identity and legitimacy of public service. It is not suggested that a robust examination of the topic in beginning texts would or could be some sort of magic bullet. But the relevant coverage found in most of these books is small and represents, in many programs, the only chance for students to explore the subject. Enhanced treatment would provide readers with an occasion to consider the role of employer-employee relations in American government and the daunting issues it confronts: divided government, fiscal austerity, labor and management ideologies, the human capital crisis, and rapid technological change (Masters, 2004).

Put differently, the employment relationship is one of life’s most critical relationships for both the employer and the employee. More analysis of this interaction will help students better understand their careers, as they may be asked to join, or not join, a union and in so doing help shape the future of the American workplace. For now, the material found in primary textbooks represents a missed opportunity to study collective action at work in some depth. This is all the more reason to heed Riccucci’s (2011, p. 207) call for a rebirth of labor-management relations research to change the “dismal” state of the field.

1 Portraits in other areas of interest include Cigler and Neiswender (1991), on bureaucracy, and Bowman, Berman, and West (2001).

2 The collective bargaining process involves three sequential activities: organizing to bargain, bargaining, and contract administration. The organizing phase includes defining procedures for establishing the bargaining unit, conducting a representation election, and selecting the bargaining team. The bargaining phase involves determining a negotiating strategy (whether to engage in adversarial bargaining or problem-solving bargaining).

When an impasse occurs during negotiations and cannot be resolved, neutral third-party mediators might be called upon to serve as a catalyst to bring the parties together. Alternatively, a fact finder may be used to hold hearings, assess arguments, and issue opinions regarding grounds for settlement. A last resort, arbitration might be required to achieve final resolution. If all else fails, then an employee strike or employer lockout might ensue. Should the bargaining process, however, be successful and a contract ratified, the contract administration phase is entered, and the roles of union stewards and first-line supervisors become paramount. Disagreements over contract interpretations or other matters can result in the filing of a grievance.

3 Bronfenbrenner (2009) found that companies had engaged in dubious and illegal tactics to ward off unionization, including requiring employee attendance at antiunion meetings, using outside consultants to run aggressive union-free campaigns, and/or retaliating against workers interested in organized labor.

4 The fact that union density in the government sector is much higher than in business has meant that some industry workers resent the compensation package available in the civil service. They believe that, as taxpayers, they are paying the kind of good wages and benefits to bureaucrats that they once enjoyed.

5 Several authors (Henry, 2013; Hill & Lynn, 2009; Milakovich & Gordon, 2013; Rosenbloom et al., 2009) have passing references to employee relations in other parts of their books, but they are sufficiently brief as to not affect the overall volume of relevant coverage in the texts.

Further, it should be pointed out that the data in this paragraph are affected by several factors. On the one hand, selected data are underestimated, given that Henry’s (2013) four-page labor-management discussion in his human resource management chapter has a two-column format (in addition, Kettl [2015] has two double-column exhibits, and
Milakovich and Gordon [2013] have two-column endnote pages). On the other hand, some data are inflated because Berkley and Rouse’s (2008) labor-management chapter devotes over twice as much space to the topic as the other books.

As a follow-up to the role of the PATCO strike in the marginalization of unions, six books did not mention it, three provided one paragraph, and two devoted a page and half to the event.

Kearney and Mareschal (2014) take a more nuanced view on this issue, concluding that:

The nature, size, and significance of the union effects…are variable, complex, and multi-faceted…[viz.]…(1) that whereas unions have exercised an upward influence on budgeting and compensation outcomes, the overall effects have been moderate and not as substantial as the monetary impacts of unions in the private sector, and (2) that the magnitude of the impact varies greatly over time, function, and jurisdiction. (p. 154)

The thematic approach taken by Rosenbloom et al. (2009)—management, politics, law—does result in more index listings in different areas of the text; yet many of these citations are only passing references to labor-management relations in those discussions.

Airline and railroad employees, who are covered not by the National Labor Relations Act of 1935 but by the stronger Railway Labor Act of 1926, have much higher unionization rates (Kahlenberg & Marvit, 2012).


REFERENCES


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